



January 2013 ANC Rally

Seminars, Public Meetings, Rallies, Conferences

This item is about public gatherings initiated by your organisation. From the small to the large these are gatherings of people who are invited to attend, whether individually or by a general announcement.

For an additional text we will use the (**attached**) final parts of “Mr Chairman”, by Wal Hannington, a British communist, organiser and author. The book was first published in 1950. Although it is distant from us in place and time, yet it can help us to think about some of these things.

Let us look at how these things can be conceived in general, and then separately, and then with South African characteristics.

All of these events fall within what we are calling Agitprop. They are ways and means at different scales, and with some variation of form, for propagating ideas in a fuller and more detailed way,

to larger numbers of people. Of course, they have a “message”, which is more or less pre-formed in the various different cases. Sometimes we are closer to “preaching”, and sometimes purposefully “listening”.

Seminars

Seminars are no different from what we do in the Communist University. A Seminar is an open-ended discussion where “no-one is right and no-one is wrong”, apart from the normal discipline of the chairperson, which rests in turn upon the self-discipline of the meeting.

In a seminar, the chairperson’s job is to protect speakers, to encourage as many as possible to speak, and to keep the meeting on-topic, but not to force any kind of conclusion.

In a seminar, the platform does not dominate and the initial speaker, who “opens the discussion”, should not use more than a quarter of the time, and preferably even less than that (but with the possibility of speaking again). Fifteen minutes might be an ideal upper limit, with ten minutes the average. A physical platform is not required in a seminar. The best arrangement of seating is an oval or a circle, as in a boardroom or a council chamber. Seminars can be very small, but also can be quite large. A seminar of 100 or even 200 is not impossible. Time used in a seminar might be from one and a half hours to two and a half hours from start to finish.

“Seminars” that are not seminars

In South Africa, it is sometimes the case that organisations will hold a public event and call it a “seminar”, when it is not a seminar. This would usually be an event that has a prior intention of endorsing a certain outcome, and where there may be several speakers on a definite platform, speaking one after another, and together using up most of the time. In these circumstances, if the chairperson is going to ask for contributions from the floor, they can only in effect be questions of clarity, suggestions, and minor amendments to the matter being presented. The conclusion of such a meeting will be some kind of adoption of the position as laid down by the platform speakers, which may have the form of a document or a declaration.

Such meetings take a very similar form to press conferences. They are more like Wal Hannington’s category 4, “For obtaining public opinion by resolution in support of a certain project”, or in other words, a “launch”.

Consultative meetings

The SACP, when preparing a campaign, has quite often in the past held invited, consultative meetings that have mainly consisted of representatives of organisations that would have an interest in such a campaign. These meetings are not quite a public launch, and yet they are more driven and directed than a pure seminar would be. They are held so as to canvass opinion and to assist in drafting a campaigning platform that will unite the broadest number of organisations and interests, after which

the Party would run the campaign. In rare cases a special purpose vehicle or in other words a new mass movement might be set up, if such an organisation had a good chance of being sustained over time.

Public Meetings

The term “Public Meeting” is on the face of it a general term, but it usually means the kind that Wal Hannington gives as his category 1, being “for demonstration and propaganda purposes only”. Such public meetings are used to spread a message, and to introduce personalities to the public. Public meetings are held at election times in South Africa, and also, for another example, by local police and other authorities when they want to address the population.

Mass Rallies

Mass Rallies usually take place in stadiums. Typical in South Africa are the “Siyanqoba” Rallies that are held in all provinces at the end of the ANC’s election campaigns. Another example would be the January 2013 rally that was held in Durban to mark the end of the 100th Centenary year of the ANC (see the illustration above).

These rallies are Agitprop on a big scale. They involve huge organisation and mobilisation, very large numbers of buses, and sometimes overflow provisions in second stadia, with electronic relay using large screens. These are whole-day commitments by the masses who attend them. There is usually entertainment of a political kind as a warm-up, and everything is done to create a

good atmosphere.

The main speaker will be a principle leader of the organisation, such as President Zuma, above, preceded by, in South Africa, leaders of the Alliance including the SACP, COSATU and SANCO, and the Leagues and MK veterans.

A good public address system is crucial.

Conferences

Conferences are also covered in Wal Hannington's book and we have included that part of the book in the attached discussion text. For our purposes, conferences may be taken as being of two kinds.

In the first place there are the constitutional conferences of organisations, often called congresses, including the SACP, ANC and COSATU-affiliated unions, held in conformity with their respective constitutions and for the purpose of making decisions about policy and about leadership succession. Those conferences have their place within the field of Agitprop. Their results have to be widely pronounced and will constantly be referred to, afterwards.

There are also conferences that are convened by broad invitation. These ones are like seminars, but on a larger scale, and are perhaps spread over one or more whole days.

Logistics, organisation and finance for Rallies and Conferences

We have looked briefly at Event Management in part 6 of the Induction course.

In both cases the date must be fixed far in advance. Finance must be arranged, and a venue selected. Especially in the case of rallies, the local authorities will have to be contacted early so that all the terms of compliance can be fulfilled in time for the event. These can be elaborate. The local authority will guide as to what will be required. In the case of conferences, the conference venue should have all of the compliance under control – but this is something that you need to check.

Accommodation and catering have to be laid on for everyone you are responsible for, and found available for all of the others.

- The above is to introduce part of our reading-text: [Public Meetings, Wal Hannington, 1950.](#)
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